

for more than a decade. It is especially ominous that this increase in the number of uninsured has occurred at a time when the economy is strong and joblessness is low.

Congress should be addressing this issue, but the Republican leadership is just not interested. What is important to average families is not important to them. Whether the issue is protecting patients against the abuses of managed care, or protecting the public against the tobacco industry, or saving social security, or raising the minimum wage, or improving education, or closing the loopholes in the campaign financing laws, the Republican leadership just doesn't think it is a priority. Their primary goal is to protect the special interests—not to protect American families.

The plight of workers without health insurance—and of families that may be protected today but could lose their insurance tomorrow—is a particularly compelling example of the need for action. Under President Clinton's leadership, Democrats in Congress have repeatedly tried to address this problem four years ago—Republicans always say, "no." Millions of Americans have suffered because we failed to act. Addressing this crisis is clearly a priority for Democrats and the nation, and it ought to be a priority for Republicans too.

We have taken incremental steps in recent years. We have made it easier for workers who change jobs to keep their health insurance, and we have expanded coverage for children. These efforts were resisted every step of the way by the Republican leadership in Congress. The new Census Bureau report confirms what everyone who deals with this problem already knows—these limited steps, as important as they are, are not nearly enough.

It should be unacceptable that 43 million Americans have no health insurance today. It should be intolerable that no American family can be confident that the health insurance they have today will be there for them tomorrow, if serious illness strikes. It is indefensible that this Congress is doing nothing to keep this problem from getting worse every year.

The vast majority—85%—of uninsured Americans are workers or members of their families. These citizens work hard—40 hours a week, 52 weeks of the year in most cases—but all their hard work cannot buy them the health insurance they need to protect their families, because they can't afford it and their employers won't provide it.

Every uninsured American is an American tragedy waiting to happen. Infants lose their chance to grow up strong and healthy because they do not get basic prenatal and post-natal care. A young family loses its livelihood because a breadwinner cannot afford needed medical care. Middle-aged parents see their savings swept away by a tidal wave of medical debt.

Earlier this year, I proposed legislation that be an important step toward

the day when every job carries with it a guarantee of affordable health care, so that every family can be confident that the quality of its health will not be determined by the amount of its wealth.

Every business is expected to pay a minimum wage, and to obey the child labor laws. Every business is expected to provide safe and healthy working conditions, and to protect against injury on the job through worker's compensation. Every business is expected to contribute to retirement through Social Security, and to the health needs of the elderly through Medicare. It is long past time for businesses also to contribute to the cost of basic health insurance coverage for their workers.

Some small firms may have special problems that call for special solutions. But there is no excuse for large firms to avoid their responsibility to provide affordable health insurance for their workers.

Under the bill I proposed, businesses with 50 or more workers will be required to provide health insurance coverage. Approximately half of all uninsured employees and their families—15 million people—will gain the coverage they need and deserve. This legislation is a giant step toward the day when every American will be guaranteed the fundamental right to health care.

Many—even most—businesses already provide insurance. The vast majority of large businesses fulfill this obligation. But too many others do not. In more and more cases, unfair competition from firms that refuse to provide insurance for their workers is compelling other firms to reduce health benefits or drop coverage altogether.

Health insurance for working Americans does not have to mean complex regulations or excessive government intervention. The legislation I introduced was simple—less than ten pages. It will not cost taxpayers a dime. It includes no specific mandated benefits or burdensome red tape. It simply says that every business with 50 workers or more must offer its employees coverage equal in value to the Blue Cross/Blue Shield Standard Option Plan that is available to every Senator and Representative, and must pay at least 72% of the cost—the same proportion that taxpayers contribute for every member of Congress.

The American people deserve health care for their families that is every bit as good as the health care they provide to every member of Congress. Shame on the Congress for ignoring this need. Shame on the Republican leadership for its misguided priorities.

When the people go to the polls in November, they deserve to know who stands with the special interests and who stands with families who need affordable health coverage.

When the new Congress returns next year, I will do everything I can to assure that health care for every Amer-

ican is as high on that Congress's priority list as it is on the priority list of American families. It is time to end the suffering. It is time for Americans to join every other country in the industrialized world and guarantee its citizens the basic right to health care.

MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Messages from the President of the United States were communicated to the Senate by Mr. Williams, one of his secretaries.

EXECUTIVE MESSAGES REFERRED

As in executive session the Presiding Officer laid before the Senate messages from the President of the United States submitting sundry nominations which were referred to the appropriate committees.

(The nominations received today are printed at the end of the Senate proceedings.)

MESSAGES FROM THE HOUSE RECEIVED DURING ADJOURNMENT

Under the authority of the order of the Senate of January 7, 1997, the Secretary of the Senate, on September 29, 1998, during the adjournment of the Senate, received a message from the House of Representatives announcing that House agrees to the report of the committee of conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the amendment of the Senate to the bill (H.R. 6) to extend the authorization of programs under the Higher Education Act of 1965, and for other purposes.

MESSAGES FROM THE HOUSE

At 11:02 a.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mr. Hays, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House has passed the following bill, without amendment:

S. 2071. An act to extend a quarterly financial report program administration by the Secretary of Commerce.

The message also announced the House disagrees to the amendment of the Senate to the bill (H.R. 3150) to amend title 11 of the United States Code, and for other purposes, and agrees to the conference asked by the Senate on the disagreeing votes of the Houses thereon; and appoints the following Members as the managers of the conference on the part of the House:

From the Committee on the Judiciary, for consideration of the House's bill and Senate amendment, and modifications committed to conference: Mr. HYDE, Mr. MCCOLLUM, Mr. GEKAS, Mr. GOODLATTE, Mr. BRYANT, Mr. CHABOT, Mr. CONYERS, Mr. NADLER, Mr. BOUCHER, and Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas.

MEASURE PLACED ON THE CALENDAR

The following measure was read the second time and placed on the calendar: